

Hello Everyone. My name is Zachary Ready from Southbury, and I am a senior in the Ellis Clark Regional Agri-Science and Technology Center of the Woodbury FFA Chapter. It is an honor of mine to speak to you on behalf of my fellow students, faculty, and administrators -I know that I speak for all of them today- and I want to begin by thanking you for being here to listen to our testimonies.

It doesn't give the agri-science program justice when I say that it has changed my life, my future, my career path, my soul forever; but that's the best way I can put it into words. It has given people like me -the victim of a broken middle school experience, lacking direction, self-esteem, and confidence- the chance to turn their lives around by having access to some of the most unparalleled opportunities available to high school students for leadership development, communication skills, and career-related experiences; experiences often limited to a college lab or classroom. On any given day, opportunities through this program may include: palpating the uterus of a living cow, analyzing urine samples of livestock to determine nutrient requirements, or emptying the lungs of a newborn breech goat kid with an elementary school audience. Regardless of what they are, they provide exceptional insight and the jumpstart for a career in agriculture, which is why the agri-science programs that are so clearly financially underrepresented are still the last remaining launch pad for the great leaders of tomorrow, leaders at the forefront of a new age in agriculture.

I came to the agri-science program with a broken self-esteem, but I emerged a completely changed individual with confidence, focus, and drive to succeed. After undergraduate college, my goal is to attend veterinary school and earn my DVM degree to begin practicing primarily in production animal medicine. The veterinary medical industry has experienced a dramatic decline in food animal veterinarians, especially in the northeast region, and the need of farmers for

veterinary care is becoming increasingly desperate. Being a part of this agri-science program has offered me incredible support for my aspirations. I have gained experience working as assistant farm manager on a 100% organic, all-natural exclusively grass-fed beef, swine, and poultry operation in Roxbury, and spend my free time shadowing a mixed practice veterinarian; working in the lab and assisting with medical procedures. I also began raising my own goats and donkeys four years ago.

The experiences and skills that I have gained through becoming an officer and participating in career development contests will be my greatest ally when it comes to achieving my academic and career goals. After participating in this past year's Dairy Judging team, my interest in the dairy industry was sparked. Competing at national shows around the country offered me the chance to see the tremendous potential in the dairy industry, and furthered my passion for working with dairy cattle. I also look forward to gaining a deeper understanding of animal agriculture on a global scale this summer. Our team's success at national convention earned us the right to participate in an agriculture abroad experience in Europe and compete internationally at the Royal Highland Show in Scotland.

My agri-science concentration is veterinary science, which has offered comprehensive and unmatched class instruction in animal health. I took a 3-credit freshman veterinary course this summer at Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine, and I found that I was leagues ahead of my peers. Without the background the program has given me, my chances of gaining admission to veterinary school as a CT resident would be second to none, with most vet schools accepting 5-15 students out of 800+ applicants. However, the incredible experiences I have had even qualify me for a Veterinary Scholars program at Purdue University, a 6-year Bachelor's Degree and

DVM degree program with guaranteed admission to the Purdue College of Veterinary Medicine as a senior in high school.

Appropriately, this year's FFA theme is Grow, and initiative to subdue world hunger. What many people don't realize is that our world is on the brink of experiencing a very pressing issue. In 40 years, the global population is expected to exceed 9 billion people. This means that the global food supply is going to become even more of a challenge. We'll need to produce more food in the next 50 years than we will have had in the past 10,000, and the responsibility of revolutionizing technology and improving agricultural efficiency is going to depend on the future generations of agricultural leaders and professionals: in other words, people like my peers and I that stand before you today.

Please increase funding for agriscience programs by adopting the ECS Task Force School Choice Funding recommendation into the Governor's Proposed Budget.

